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AUTHOR Durgunoglu, Aydin Y.
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ABSTRACT

To investigate affective dimensions of adult literacy development more systematically, researchers conducted a qualitative comparative analysis of four women participating in an adult literacy program in Istanbul, Turkey. The contrastive study chose two participants who completed the course; each was matched with a participant who had dropped out. They were matched in terms of their spelling, letter identification, and word recognition levels at the beginning of the course. As much as possible, they were matched in terms of age and number of children. Responses to a lengthy, semi-structured interview before courses started were compared to detect differences in how they approached adult literacy classes. All reported they had not attended any school because their elders thought it was inappropriate or not useful, but all learned the letters on their own, indicating similar levels of cognitive ability. The four participants had very similar spelling, letter recognition, and word recognition scores at the beginning. The two completing participants had high levels of motivation and self-confidence as compared with the two noncompleters. The researchers say the cases illustrated that affective variables such as motivation and self efficacy are important in whether participants will complete or drop out of an adult literacy class, even when their beginning literacy levels and cognitive skills are comparable. (YLB)

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Affective dimensions of adult literacy development

Aydin Y. Durgunoglu

University of Minnesota Duluth

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Although cognitive and linguistic factors play an important role in adult literacy development, affective factors need to be considered as well. As Comings, Parrella, & Soricone (2000) summarized, a key difference between adult and child literacy education is that adults have a choice in attending classes. Therefore adults' goals, needs and expectations affect their attendance, persistence and effort level and through those, the literacy outcomes.

It has been a challenge to understand why some people persevere and not give up when they experience uncontrollable, aversive events, whereas others develop a sense of "learned helplessness" and feel that whatever they do will not change the outcome so it is no use to try (Seligman, 1975). It is important to understand these affective factors because cognitive outcomes are closely linked with them. For example, comparisons of good and poor adult readers' use of metacognitive skills indicated that good readers were more likely to persist and continue using the metacognitive strategies in order to comprehend the text even when the text was difficult. Poor readers, on the other hand, were likely to give up more easily when faced with a difficult text (Baker, 1989).

Affective factors are particularly relevant for adult learners, who may have a disproportionate number of events in their lives that are beyond their control (e.g., lack of family support; poverty...). Current research on positive psychology indicates that individuals' explanations of adverse events are closely linked to their persistence and coping levels. Individuals who explain adverse events as caused by stable and internal factors are more likely to have lower expectations and feel depressed (Peterson & Vaidya, 2001). In our previous work, informal observations made us notice that a sense of self-efficacy, optimism about the possibilities in the future, and high levels of motivation were traits of individuals who stayed in an adult literacy program. If the participants attributed failure to stable and internal factors ("I'm stupid"), they were less likely to persist. Likewise participants who stated "I'm too old", "My time to learn has passed" were showing less effort.

To investigate the affective dimensions of adult literacy development more systematically, we conducted a qualitative comparative analysis of four women who were participating in an adult literacy program in Istanbul, Turkey. These participants were part of a bigger study involving many cognitive measurements, and interviews. Of the 57 participants in the original study, 38 had completed the course and 19 had dropped out. For this contrastive study, we chose two participants who had completed the course (hereafter labeled as "completing") and matched each with a participant who had dropped out (hereafter labeled as "not completing").

In previous studies, existing literacy levels at the beginning of a course was found to be an important predictor of course completion rates. Therefore, we matched the completing and not completing participants in terms of their spelling, letter identification and word recognition levels at the beginning of the course. Finally as

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much as possible, we tried to match participants in terms of age and number of children.

The basic profiles of the participants at the beginning of the course:

Name	Completed the course?	Age	Marital status	Children	Letter	Word recognition	Spelling
Fatma	yes	38	widowed	3	55	16	87
Saniye	yes	31	married	3	56	17	79
Rukiye	no	38	married	1	58	17	89
Hamide	no	33	married	4	58	17	88

All participants had completed a lengthy, semi-structured interview before the courses had started. The interview asked questions about their life history, previous literacy experiences, reasons for coming to class, goals and aspirations. In this analysis, we compared the responses of the matched participants to detect any differences in how they approached adult literacy classes. The goal is to see if affective factors--such as attitude, goals, expectations, self-efficacy-- were different for these participants who were matched on some demographic and cognitive variables, but showed different outcomes at the end of the course.

All four participants were also similar in why they did not go to school. All reported that they had not attended any school because their elders thought that it was not appropriate or useful for girls to go to school. However, all had learned the letters on their own, indicating similar levels of cognitive ability. Because Turkish has a very systematic spelling-sound correspondences, individuals with some letter knowledge find it relatively easy to start decoding words. It is important to note that the four participants had very similar spelling, letter recognition and word recognition scores at the beginning. Therefore their existing literacy foundations or the course difficulty cannot be the explanation for differences in their achievements. However their individual profiles--drawn from the interviews--highlight the differences in the affective factors:

Fatma had a very difficult life. She was born as one of 9 siblings in a village. The three brothers were sent to school, but not the 6 sisters. She got married when she was 21, but her husband died 4 years ago, leaving behind three children, two boys and a girl. The children are 17, 12 and 6 now. The middle child has muscular dystrophy. In addition, her husband had a stroke and was paralyzed for many years before he died and she took care of him for many years. She expresses very eloquently the difficulties she faces everyday and the deep sense of loss that she is feeling because of not being able to read and write. She stated that she would have finished college if she could. Currently because of economic difficulties some people advise her to pull her 17-year-old daughter out of school and send her to work. She is adamantly opposed to that. She is trying to get her daughter to finish high school, but does not think that she can afford to send her to college. Her disabled son is not going to school, because he does not have enough energy to even hold the pencil, but she is trying to teach him as well. Some of her neighbors criticize her, telling her to stay at home and watch her children. In spite of all those difficulties, she has an incredible joy of living. For example, when

something is playing on TV, she says that she sings and dances along to get her son to cheer up. When discussing her plans, she stated "I'm going to attend the classes, I won't have any obstacles". When she was asked about how difficult she thinks the course will be she said "It will be difficult, but God willing, we'll overcome. See, to crochet or knit, first it looks difficult, but once you start, it gets easier. I hope reading is like that too."

The second participant, **Saniye**, was born in a village in Southeastern Turkey, to a family with 4 siblings. When she was 5, her father was killed. After her father died, her uncle took care of her family, and because money was tight, she never went to school. Her husband is her uncle's son. They have 3 children, ages 11, 10 and 6. She says that she tried to learn "letters and words from TV and newspapers, but did not have a foundation". She always wanted to learn to read. In fact, she sent her oldest son to school early because of her own interest. She has been trying to find adult literacy classes for years, and was continuously asking around. When this class started, her husband said "don't go, what are you going to do with reading and writing after this age?" [she is 31], but she persisted. Some neighbors made fun of her. However, her children are very enthusiastic and supportive. She says "when you make a decision, first you have to believe in yourself". She was 7 months pregnant when the courses started, and she had some health problems and did not attend the classes regularly. However, she has very high levels of self-confidence and motivation. "I believed in myself before as well, but people around us thought of us as ignorant. We couldn't express ourselves well...I believe in myself. We are ignorant and cannot read and write, but we have life experiences. In this course I haven't advanced much, I was ill a lot, but I have a lot more interest in literacy. Before [when trying to read something] I would get bored and discouraged easily". Now she can read many things, but still feels weak in her writing.

Contrast the high levels of motivation and self-confidence expressed by Fatma and Saniye with the following two noncompleting participants:

Hamide was one of 7 siblings. She got married when she was 18, and has 4 children ages 13, 12, 11 and 5. She says that she can read, and take care of her needs such as taking a bus, going to a hospital. Because her husband has his own business and cannot leave it, she also takes care of work that needs to be done outside of the house, such as going to the bank. She started the course to get a prediploma at the end [so that she can attend the second course] to eventually get her drivers' license. When asked about what kind of books they have at home, she said "My daughters love books and buy a lot but she says that she I do not pay much attention". She started the course not for personal development, but as a means to get a driver's license.

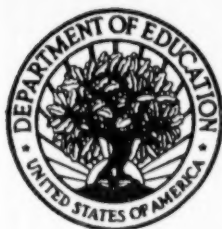
Rukiye is one of 12 siblings. She was born in a village, but since her father owned a tractor, their livelihood wasn't that bad. She has been married for 23 years and has a 21-year old son, going to college. When asked about what kind of books they have at home, she said "My son has his textbooks, and some of those black things [encyclopedias] I don't know since I do not pay much attention". As for her reasons for coming to the class "My sister and neighbors are coming to the course. I heard from them. It is also good exercise. I live at a distance, so I come thinking that morning exercise is good". When asked about her goals for future, for example to read books, newspapers, "I don't have that interest".

Not surprisingly Fatma and Saniye had completed the course, but Rukiye and Hamide had quit. These cases begin to illustrate that affective variables such as motivation and self-efficacy are quite important in whether participants will complete or drop out of an adult literacy class, even when their beginning literacy levels and cognitive skills are quite comparable.

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